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SUBJECT: CUBA'S MASSIVE MOBILIZATION CAPACITY

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite its limited resources, the GOC has proven that, when it wants to, it can successfully mobilize people and assets. This cable describes some examples of this and provides a window into the existing organizational infrastructures and capabilities. It is an open question how many of these would survive the end of Cuba's totalitarian rule, and then another question whether their survival would be good for Cuba or for Cuba/U.S. relations. If we arrive at acceptable answers to these open questions, then USG agencies may consider tapping into them during a transitional humanitarian assistance scenario. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Through the years, the GOC has demonstrated a capacity to mobilize its organizations -- at every level, its resources, and the population at large. The GOC's overarching presence in every aspect of Cuban society, combined with its totalitarian nature and its defensive posture (with regard to the U.S.), have made it an efficient mobilization machine. This cable describes some examples of this and provides a window into existing organizational infrastructures and capabilities.

Natural Disaster Preparedness

¶3. (U) During the weekend of 19-20 May, a national disaster preparedness exercise, Meteoro (meteor) 2007, took place throughout Cuba. The goal of the exercise was to improve the national Civil Defense System in the event of major natural disasters, mainly hurricanes, and other catastrophes. The system is made up of National, Provincial, and Municipal Defense Councils which divide up the country into Defense Zones. The organizational structure of the civil defense system is separate from and supersedes that of the Revolutionary Defense Committees (CDRs), which can be found every few blocks throughout Cuba. Meteoro 2007 also included the activation and mobilization of numerous other GOC organizations: Command posts, units and equipment from the FAR (Army) and MININT (Interior Ministry); firefighting, emergency medical, and law enforcement personnel; major logistical and transportation resources; and the population at large.

¶4. (U) Most components of the civil defense system are civilian, but are ultimately under the control of the

military. That said, most of the planning, coordination and execution is carried out by civilians and at regional levels -- national, provincial, and municipal civil defense councils responsible for the various Defense Zones. Heading every defense council is the First Secretary of the PCC (Cuban Communist Party) at each level. Other council members come from a mix of representatives from provincial and municipal governments (PCC officials), CDRs, and other state organizations.

15. (U) The civil defense system is mostly based on preventive measures that can be taken by local authorities, directing the general population, and using local resources. In cases where, for instance, a rescue operation becomes necessary, civil defense authorities coordinate with the FAR for helicopter, amphibious craft or other required support. In real hurricane-threat scenarios, the civil defense system has designated entire defense zones as at-risk and been able to evacuate all inhabitants located in those areas, sometimes in excess of one million people. 19 civil defense councils were activated and 7,000 people evacuated during heavy rains at the end of May 2007 that affected areas in the central and eastern parts of Cuba, especially the city of Camaguey.

National Defense Mobilization -----

16. (U) Operation Caguairan is a defense preparedness exercise, in which Cuban armed forces and reserves, as well as all other security-related organizations are mobilized -- essentially to defend Cuba from a U.S. military invasion. Most recently, a massive Caguairan exercise accompanied the "temporary" transfer of power from Fidel to Raul Castro last August. The exercise involved the mobilization of more than

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200,000 active and reserve forces as well as their logistical support -- shelter, food, etc. -- for periods varying between 15 and 30 days. The Caguairan execution also included a "precautionary" increase of "preventive" security and police control measures.

Political and "Anti-Corruption" Mobilization -----

17. (U) The GOC has shown the capacity to mobilize up to two million people for political demonstrations. Such mobilizations require the transfer of large groups of people through a variety of means (by foot, buses, trucks, trains) from multiple locations (different neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools in different municipalities and provinces, including rural locations). Most political demonstrations require additional logistics to support the large crowds, such as water, some food, emergency medical services, and makeshift toilet facilities.

18. (U) The GOC has also mobilized non-military/non-civil defense personnel for other political reasons. Beginning in October 2005, as part of an anti-corruption drive ordered by Fidel Castro, thousands of so-called "social workers" and students were mobilized to take over the management and operation of gas stations throughout the country. In a similar anti-corruption offensive, also in 2005, FAR general Moises Sio Wong was temporarily placed in charge of Havana port operations.

19. (U) And in USINT's front yard, the GOC mobilized a public works and construction team to build the flag park that blocks the public's view of USINT's facade. They did this in the second half of January, 2006, in direct response to USINT's unveiling of our streaming electronic billboard: 138 flagpoles with supports and flags, plus a reviewing stand. The flagpoles reach as high as the USINT building and, by Cuban construction standards, were built in record time. (Note: Average Cubans looked on in disillusionment, as their own housing, roads and environmental quality continued to

deteriorate.)

Preventive Health Mobilization

¶10. (U) The GOC has for decades carried out national vaccination campaigns, particularly for children. The Ministry of Public Health is in charge overall since it oversees the hospitals, clinics and medical personnel. The Ministry of Education plays a supporting role as a good portion of the vaccines are administered in the schools. CDRs also administer vaccinations at the neighborhood level.

¶11. (U) Other mechanisms are used to mount national preventive measures against Dengue fever or to collect blood donations. These campaigns are good examples of "coercive volunteerism" in Cuba. Dengue fumigation, publicity campaigns and inspections are executed down to the neighborhood level by the CDRs and by "volunteer" communist youth organizations. Blood donations take place at the donor banks belonging to the Ministry of Public Health, but the promotion campaign to find "volunteers" is tasked to the CDRs. A recent announcement revealed that the campaign would be temporarily interrupted as the blood stocks are currently full.

¶12. (U) As a result of the experience gained from its overseas medical missions, the GOC has been able to develop a capacity to rapidly deploy humanitarian assistance teams and equipment. A good example of this was a significant Cuban contingent deployed to Pakistan during the aftermath of a massive earthquake last year. The teams are typically made up of doctors, paramedics, nurses, teachers and other professionals. The GOC transports the personnel with the necessary equipment and provides them with logistical and administrative support during their deployment. The GOC also accompanies these teams with heavy security details, to prevent defections, and political activists, to ensure that whatever assistance is rendered scores a requisite amount of propaganda value for the regime.

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Food Distribution and Humanitarian Aid

¶13. (U) The Cuban rationing system reaches every corner of the island and constitutes an already-existing network for the distribution of humanitarian aid to the Cuban population. The system falls under the Ministry of Domestic (Interior) Commerce but involves imported as well as domestically produced food. Food is imported through state-firm ALIMPORT, while food produced in Cuba falls under the purview of the Ministries of Agriculture and Food Industry. Distribution is carried out by trucks and trains from a variety of sources. Although many belong to the Ministry of Transportation, others come from other GOC agencies or companies, and some -- pre-1959 trucks -- even belong to private citizens.

¶14. (SBU) Other potential means of distribution are the networks used by United Nations agencies for the implementation of their programs (Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Program, UN Development Program, and UNICEF). These agencies operate throughout the island and have established working relationships with Cubans -- GOC and non-GOC -- with directed but nonetheless key roles in the transportation and distribution networks.

Comments:

¶15. (S) CAFC II and civilian-military exercises that have rehearsed delivering emergency USG assistance to a post-Castro Cuba have grappled with the question of Cuban distribution networks. One problem is to determine how much

of Cuba's crumbling infrastructure and vehicle fleet is in working order. With all its problems, however, Cuba has a creaky but functioning infrastructure that has managed, albeit with considerable leakage throughout, to deliver enough food for Cubans to, as they call it, "get by." Current USG planning focuses on building capacity to "independently" deliver aid. If only USG and other donor assets are used, even at a later phase when USG-led efforts could bring vast quantities of aid to Cuba, such aid will only reach a minority of Cubans. In contrast, by tapping into the existing Cuban infrastructure -- and the Cubans who know how it works -- aid could potentially reach all 11 million Cubans. Our goal in such an effort should be to create the conditions that would enable use of every available truck in Cuba, whether it belongs to the GOC or not.

¶16. (S) A second problem is to determine how much of the communist mobilization system that survives can be trusted to work with us and with a transitional leadership. We believe that a post-Castro Cuba will require some level of "debaathification." We would expect, for example, that CDRs and other conduits for totalitarian rule should be dismantled, as Oswaldo Paya puts it, "brick by brick." Another realistic assumption, however, is that a legitimate Cuban transition government -- one that meets CAFC II and Helms-Burton conditions, and requests aid from the U.S. -- would also carry out such clean up on its own. To meet the conditions, CDRs will have gone out of business and/or morphed into some form of de-politicized organization that is acceptable to the Cuban transition government and the USG. We would expect the same to happen with other GOC organizations with which the USG would consider cooperating during a US-led humanitarian relief effort. We therefore suggest not completely discounting some form of the existing Cuban infrastructure when the time comes.
PARMLY